

BAPTISM, REPENTANCE OR FAITH?

According to the Bible, what saves? Is it Baptism, Repentance or Faith? We want to look into this matter on the Scriptural teaching concerning salvation. In the past, we have been guilty of stressing and believing that baptism saves; that we become “born again” or saved when we are baptized.

I cannot remember hearing any instructions or teachings stating that a person must be “born-again,” or “saved,” BEFORE they become baptized.

I have the feeling that 99 per cent of us felt that we became saved when we were baptized. When a candidate entered the waters of baptism, he or she was asked, before going down into the waters, “Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?”

Actually, in most cases the candidate had not the foggiest notion of what this meant, but they weakly answered, “I do!” That is as much as many ever knew about the whole matter, and I suppose, when they said, “I do,” they believed that when they went under the waters of baptism immediately after their answer that saved them.

They were told that by actually going down under the water that they were being baptized into Christ; they were born again, coming up out of the waters a new person. I believe members of various churches have suffered a lot of disappointments, troubles and difficulties, and many have failed because they never understood the Biblical order of how to receive salvation.

When our children reach the age of accountability, and we start encouraging them to be baptized, and become members of the Church, otherwise they would not get into Heaven, we must first warn them that repentance and acceptance of Christ is required. They must FIRST be born again by the Holy Spirit through repentance, BEFORE they ever set foot in the water to be baptized.

Thousands have fallen away and never kept the faith, and many have failed because they did not know what they were doing. The great majority surely went into those waters of baptism feeling that this act saved them in some way, and that it had merit.

Relying on this false hope, they depended on their own works to save them. The fact that they had never truly repented, never understood the need for the “new birth,” never learned the necessity of being saved BEFORE they were baptized, they naturally were not in any position to stand up to Satan and keep in victory and live the true Christian life.

Too many went down into the waters of baptism as sinners, and came up as “WET SINNERS.” Therefore, let us start right in the beginning and see the proper order of being “born again” and “saved” based upon the Bible, and then let us get to Baptism, which comes AFTER, and in NO WAY saves us!

“Why should I repent?” someone asks. Then he adds, “I really haven’t done anything very bad, I’ve lived a good clean moral life.” Why do people rebel against the idea of repentance? It is primarily because of the inherent stubbornness of the natural man.

Most of us don’t like to admit that we have been wrong. To admit that implies that we must

change our ways and we are not about to change for God or anyone else, So we had persons who were not prepared, persons who had not been born of the Spirit, persons who had not been born from above, and never truly repented as they should have, they were depending on baptism to save them. They felt there was some merit in baptism.

We definitely taught and believed over all those years that we were saved by Grace, and kept by works. I am sure the great majority thought that by being baptized, this would save them, and they would not need to be born of the Spirit. How could they help but to fail when Satan came at them full force? Naturally they fell.

God is calling on all men everywhere to repent, Acts 17:30,31, "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now He commands all men everywhere to repent..." Not only is this His call to the unsaved, but believers often do more confessing of their sins after salvation comes to them than at the time of that initial, basic repentance which accompanies the "new birth." Why is this?

After a person is saved, normally his heart is sensitive to wrongdoing and his will is broken before God. Therefore, at the slightest sin, the Holy Spirit convicts him of it, so he repents, confesses and forsakes this sin.

Does the unconverted sinner need to repent to be saved? Is there really an initial, basic repentance involved in the salvation of a soul? There are some who say, "No, repentance has nothing to do with salvation." They tend to say that repentance is a work of man.

However, the Bible teaches that repentance is a part of the overall plan of coming to Christ by faith of being "born again." It is an essential element in this grand, majestic miracle of the "new birth: which God performs in the life of those who truly believe in Jesus Christ, receiving Him by faith as Savior.

As Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he CANNOT see the kingdom of God," So many preachers present the Gospel by going light on repentance but are heavy on the benefits of accepting Christ.

Hundreds of thousands, even millions are going around today thinking they are saved, when according to the Bible they are not. They do not understand the commitment, the surrender and the repentance that is first required. It is IMPOSSIBLE to become "born again" without it.

Such teaching has produced many who claim to be saved but go right on in their sin. They fit right into the world as they did before. There is little or no change. But what does the Bible say, 2nd Corinthians 5:17:

Therefore if any person IS [INGRAFTED] IN CHRIST (the Messiah) he is a NEW CREATION (a new creature altogether); the old [previous moral and spiritual condition] has passed away. Behold, the fresh and new has come!

When the Lord miraculously saved Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road, the Lord called Saul to preach the Gospel. Paul describes his commission from God in this way, Acts. 26:18-20:

“I have appeared to you for this purpose... to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me,”

“Wherefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those at Damascus, then at Jerusalem and throughout all the country of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should REPENT and turn to God and perform deeds worthy of their REPENTANCE.”

The nature of true repentance must be clearly understood. Many people falsely think of it as going through some torture or self-punishment that throws one into some deep emotional turmoil. The word REPENTANCE as used in the New Testament means simply, “TURN TO,” “TURN FROM,” or “to have another mind” or “to change the mind.”

This change of mind is not simply a passing whim brought about by the individual involved. Rather it must be thought of as the work of the Spirit of God through the Word of God to bring conviction that you are wrong--to effect a change of your mind.

When a person comes for salvation this change of mind will involve a complete reversal in his thinking about the Word of God, about God Himself, about sin and about his way of life. It will reverse one's thinking about his need and lost condition, about Christ the Savior and the acceptance of Him.

Repentance is not a work of the flesh, but is the work of God. Repentance is not contrary to belief; it does not deny the great Biblical doctrine of Salvation by Grace through Faith, as Paul taught, Ephesians 2:8.

Rather, it is basic to the whole act of coming to Christ. It is part and parcel of receiving Christ as Savior. You see, you cannot come to Christ without turning your back on your OLD ways. In your unbelief and rebellion you had turned away from God.

In 1st Thessalonians 1:9, Paul wrote to that Church, “They tell us the story...of how you TURNED (converted) from idols to serve the true living God, and how your whole lives now look forward to the coming of His Son from Heaven.”

This beautifully illustrates the very essence of coming to Christ--to TURN TO God from idols, or FROM the OLD WAY of life. These believers at Thessalonica had CHANGED their minds about their idols--to the true God.

The Holy Spirit working in their hearts had prompted and enabled them to do so. This work of God's Grace also empowered them to TURN from idols to Jehovah God. Isaiah puts it very well, Isaiah 55:7,8:

“Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him RETURN TO the Lord, and He will have love, pity, and mercy for him, and to our God, for He will multiply to him His abundant pardon. For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord.”

We must understand that our ways and our thoughts are pretty much inseparable. We act the way we think. Our beliefs tend to determine our way of life.

So when God says, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts" God is actually talking about one and the same thing. To accept Christ and receive Eternal Life, an individual must accept God's Word, the Holy Bible. The Holy Bible is the source book of our knowledge of Christ.

Without it we have no basis on which to receive Christ. He Himself said, "I assure you, most solemnly I tell you, the person whose ears are open to My words [who listens to My message] and believes and trusts in and clings to and relies on Him Who sent Me has (possesses now) Eternal Life. And he does not come into judgment [does not incur sentence of judgment, will not come under condemnation], but he has already passed over out of death into life. John 5:24

Paul said, For Godly grief and the pain God is permitted to direct, produce a repentance that leads and contributes to salvation and deliverance from evil, and it never brings regret; but worldly grief (the hopeless **sorrow** that is characteristic of the pagan world) is deadly [breeding and ending in death]. Amplified translation. Phillips translation puts it this way: "The sorrow which God uses means a change of heart and leads to salvation--it is the world's sorrow that is such a deadly thing."

Much of the sorrow the world manifests about sin is merely being sorry for getting caught and having to pay the penalty. But Godly sorrow gives a sense of personal pollution and guilt, Psalm 51:1-7: HAVE MERCY upon me, O God, according to Your steadfast love; according to the multitude of Your tender mercy and loving-kindness blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly [and repeatedly] from my iniquity and guilt and cleanse me and make me wholly pure from my sin! For I am conscious of my transgressions and I acknowledge them; my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned and done that which is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified in Your sentence and faultless in Your judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in [a state of] iniquity; my mother was sinful who conceived me [and I too am sinful]. Behold, You desire truth in the inner being; make me therefore to know wisdom in my inmost heart. Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean [ceremonially]; wash me, and I shall [in reality] be whiter than snow." Amplified translation.

The "Godly grief and the pain" that produce a repentance is a deep remorse that you have hurt and offended God by your sin. It is brought about by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, John 17:7-11:

"Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me. "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are."

To get right with God a person must have a God-given CHANGE OF MIND. He must forsake his OWN thoughts. He must think as God thinks about his sin and his need. He will never enter the door to salvation, which is Christ, unless he repents in this Bible way.

The prodigal son changed his mind and went home to be forgiven by His father. To be sure of Heaven, the unsaved person must change his mind about Christ, the Savior, and the matter of accepting Him in simple, child-like faith. Satan tries to tempt a person into thinking that he can be saved by his own good works.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is NOT your own doing, it is the gift of God--NOT because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

In Isaiah 64:6, God says that even “our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.” The paraphrase puts it, “We are all infected and impure with sin. When we put on our prized robes of righteousness (self-righteous works) we find they are but filthy rags.”

I believe some Churches have been under the delusion, even if they deny it, that you are saved by works. But we have to get it straight. It is not what YOU DO that saves you. Let us remember this: even if we forget everything else: IT IS WHAT CHRIST DID FOR YOU AT CALVARY’S Cross when He bore your sins in His own body on the tree.

1st Peter 2:24, “He personally bore our sins in His own body on the Cross, so that we might be dead to sin and be alive to righteousness.”

To repent will mean changing your mind about your views of the need and way of salvation. Hear the warning from God’s Word, Jesus said, “I tell you, unless you REPENT (and be converted) (TURN from your wicked ways) you will all perish.”

Let us also understand: repentance alone will not save you. It can only serve to bring you to the place where you will receive Christ by faith as your Savior. The fact is that much of the teaching on this subject, as it relates to salvation, falls into one of two extremes. Either the necessity for repentance is altogether ignored, or it is made to be a separate act from believing, and the sinner is led to think that he must do TWO different things: repent and believe.

But the first thing to understand about repentance is what IT IS NOT. Sorrow itself is not repentance, though repentance may be accompanied by sorrow. Even weeping about sin is not in itself repentance. Many have sorrowed and wept about sin in their lives, NOT because they have seen the awfulness of it, and have desired to have it right before God.

Rather because they have suffered a ruined reputation or some physical infirmity, or because some cherished ambition has been blocked. Real repentance is a “change of mind” that reaches the heart.

Real repentance is to think differently about God and about one’s self. We see a beautiful illustration of repentance in the parable spoken by our Lord Jesus, as recorded in Matthew 21:28-30:

“What do you think? A man had two sons; and he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today,’ And he answered, ‘I will not’; but afterward he repented and went. And he went to the second and said the same; and he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go.”

The action of this first son proved that he had had a CHANGE OF MIND. It is always this way with repentance, and it can only be wrought by the Holy Spirit.

It is through the Word of God that we see the need for repentance in our lives. In fact, true repentance is to THINK DIFFERENTLY about God and sin, because the Word of God thinks differently from the human heart, which according to Jeremiah 17:9: “is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.” Let us observe how the Word of God produced repentance in the hearts of the saints of Corinth. In his first letter to them, Paul rebuked them sharply for allowing unjudged sin in their church fellowship, an immoral brother sinning openly.

Paul therefore wrote this in 2nd Corinthians 7:8-11. Here we have a picture of the Word working in hearts, and lives being changed as the result. This is true repentance for the Christian, and it should be a continual thing in our lives, confessing every sin we commit.

But the BIG question is: What part does repentance have in salvation itself? The Apostle Paul testified of the need of “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ”, and that the Jew and Gentile alike he says, “should repent and TURN TO God, and do works meet for repentance”, (Acts 20:21; 26:20),

In Romans 2:4 we read, that “the goodness of God leadeth...TO REPENTANCE.” And in 2nd Peter 3:9, “The Lord is not slow about His promise... but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should REACH REPENTANCE.”

On the other hand, we have other salvation verses in which repentance is not mentioned, such as in Acts 16:31, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” Romans 10:9, “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you WILL BE SAVED.”

John 3:16, “For God so greatly loved and dearly prized the world that He [even] gave up His only begotten (unique) Son, so that whoever believes in (trusts in, clings to, relies on) Him shall not perish (come to destruction, be lost) but have Eternal (Everlasting) Life.”

We are always glad to give Scriptural advice and counsel to those who desire to write us about their problems, and to remember their requests for prayer in our services.

In addition, we publish sermons on other subjects, which take up in detail teaching on how to deal with God successfully and be delivered out of all our troubles. We will gladly send them to those who desire them for their own use or for others.

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